SOCIAL CHAOS AND RACIAL CONFLICT IN THE NOVELS OF

JAMES BALDWIN

A

SYNOPSIS

SUBMITTED TO

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SUPERVISOR
DR. MONIKA SINGH
ASST. PROF.
GOVT. J. Y. CHHATTISGARH COLLEGE
RAIPUR (C.G.)

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
ASHISH SHRIVASTAVA

RESEARCH CENTER
GOVT. J. Y. CHHATTISGARH COLLEGE
RAIPUR (C.G.)

1. Title of the Thesis: Social Chaos and Racial Conflict in the novels of James Baldwin

2. Introduction:

Originally called the 'New Negro Movement', the Harlem Renaissance was a literary and intellectual flowering that fostered a new black identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Racism was very strong in South America. During the Harlem Renaissance, thousands of black Americans travelled from rural Southern areas to Northern cities in search of better life opportunities. But it resulted into increased tension between the races there also and the situation became worse than before. The Black social activists were pushing to eradicate segregation and racism in the whole nation. The African American authors were also trying to depict these issues in their writings. The times needed one to raise the voice of the black Americans against discrimination based on race. James Baldwin was one of the first writers to do so whose works addressed issues of race and inequality.

The period, during which Baldwin lived, the curse of racial oppression had already been endured for years. Through his novels, he explored the outrage and anguish of African Americans struggling to put an end to racial partiality, oppression, exploitation and their effort to achieve civil and human rights.

3. A brief Review of the Work already done in the field:

Several critical essays and books have been published on the relevant topic. Some of the works, which are being studied thoroughly, are as follows: -

Barry, P. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Literary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.

Campbell, James. *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Williams, Sherley Anne. *Give Birth to Brightness: The Thematic Study in Neo-Black Literature*. New York: Dial Press, 1999.

Apart from this, secondary study material is being collected.

4. Objectives:

This thesis will emphasize on the literary and social achievements of James Baldwin along with his participation in the Civil Rights Movement in order to emancipate the Black Americans in the contemporary society. This thesis will be useful for the society as well as it will be beneficial for research scholars for further research.

5. Noteworthy Contribution in the field of proposed work:

Various books have been produced on James Baldwin and his works over the years. Some remarkable books are as follows: -

Bone, Robert A. *James Baldwin – The Negro Novel in America*. London: Yale University Press, 1965. Print.

O'Daniel, Therman B. *James Baldwin: A Critical Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1977. Print

Pratt, Louis H. *James Baldwin*. Boston: Twayne, 1978. Print.

Scott, Lynn Orilla. *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002. Print.

6. Proposed Methodology during the tenure of research work:

Reading of the primary sources, secondary sources, various authentic documents and journals will be of immense help in this research work. As far as the format and

documentation is concerned, 7th edition of MLA Handbook for writers of Research Papers will be carefully followed.

7. Expected Outcome of the proposed work:

This thesis will endeavour to propose a better understanding of the personal, social and racial struggle of the African Americans in the contemporary American society through the novels of James Baldwin so that there can be created a scope of universal oneness among all the communities in the world. The tentative chapterization of the proposed research work will be as follows:

I) Introduction

II) His Humanitarianism

III) Discrimination and Social Chaos

IV) Social Alienation and Dispossession

V) Social Reconstruction and Reformation

VI) Conclusion

Chapter-I

Introduction

One of the internationally acclaimed African American authors of his generation, James Baldwin is best known for his novels and essays. He wrote with eloquence and passion on the subject of race in America. His was one of the longest voice America had ever heard and his face was as uniquely and intensely expressive as his voice and his writings. Baldwin intended upon pricking the consciences of all Americans in an era, particularly the 1960s, when a liberal climate was especially receptive to that pricking. His works mainly deal with

the social and racial issues in the mid twentieth Century America. His novels are notable for the personal way in which they explore questions of identity as well as for how they examine complex social and psychological pressures related to being black.

Baldwin was born on 2 August, 1924 in Harlem and brought up there only. After graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School in 1944, he spent his time in self study and literary apprenticeship in Greenwich Village. In 1948, he left for Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life, though he visited United States periodically. His long list of literary accomplishments includes novels, plays and essays.

Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) is a semiautobiographical account that studies the roles of the Christian church in the lives of African Americans, both as a source of suppression and moral hypocrisy and also as a source of community and inspiration. More deeply, the novel examines racism in the United States.

His second novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956) explores the theme of social alienation and intertwined relationships in the society.

Another Country (1962), Baldwin's third novel features practical and spiritual difficulties such as class, race and gender.

His fourth novel *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) deals with insidious problem of racism deeply rooted in the American consciousness and imagination.

Published in the year 1974 *If Beale Street Could Talk*, which is Baldwin's fifth novel, concerns with Racism against Negros. More importantly it raises the issue whether black people have to accept racial subordination and exploitation or have to battle against it.

Just Above My Head is Baldwin's last novel which was published in the year 1979. This novel describes Racism against the African Americans in America and their struggle for individuality.

Chapter II

His Humanitarianism

Racism's historical legacies and contemporary impacts have powerfully shaped mid 20 Century American history. The persistent suppression and exploiting treatment of the blacks resulted into the emergence of Civil Rights Movement in 1955.

Baldwin's experience with Racism and his humanitarian outlook got him into the Civil Rights Movement. He got involved in this movement initially as a writer. Later, Baldwin became a reviewer, defender and reporter of the Civil Rights Movement. His novels advertised not only the movement but its aims also. As one of the most visible proponents of the movement, he drew attention of the public towards the problem being faced by black people in the United States.

Baldwin through his art tried to assert that all of mankind is united by virtue of their humanity. This chapter will throw light on Baldwin's novels that kindled the conscience and consciousness of the residents of the United States.

Chapter III

Discrimination and Social Chaos

The 1930's were a disturbed time for race relations in the United States. Racism was as strong as ever in the Southern states. During the World War II, many Black Americans migrated from Southern cities to Northern states which subsequently resulted into increased tension between the races there as well. The social condition of the Black Americans was

extremely miserable. The inescapable force of racism was leading their lives towards more severe condition than before. They were paid lower wages than the whites. Their awful economical, social and racial plight has been portrayed by James Baldwin in his novels realistically. All the Baldwin novels conspicuously present a true picture of the Black Americans and their struggle for equality in all spheres.

Baldwin made available an opportunity to the oppressed and discriminated black folk to identify their self within the characters of his novels. This chapter will highlight the pitiable condition of the blacks through minute analysis of Baldwin's characters.

Chapter IV

Social Alienation and Dispossession

In all his novels, James Baldwin insistently seeks personal and racial equality and impartiality in the morally and intellectually impoverished white American society. He chooses to show the problem of human relations in his novels. He keenly displays the scars and wounds, which were a result of persistent oppression, exploitation, negation and also denial faced by the blacks in American society. In his novels, all the black characters suffer from a deep sense of dispossession and alienation. They are seen struggling for their personal and social identity. This chapter will focus on the characters of Baldwin's novel and their bitter experience of social alienation and dispossession.

Chapter V

Social Reconstruction and Reformation

James Baldwin's values were courage, fairness, honesty and compassion. His vision made him unique among the writers of his times. He saw the dangers of the inability of the whites to recognize or accept reality. In the time of Baldwin, the society was in the grip of

many evils, such as social inequality, racial oppression and exploitation of the Blacks by the white natives. Baldwin in his works attempted vehemently to eradicate these problems from society so that the society can be suitable and inhabitable for all the races. Baldwin's works have a strong personal, social and intellectual appeal. The contemporary American society badly needed to be reformed and reconstructed. Baldwin took up this responsibility upon his shoulder and with his novels he successfully proved his caliber and capability as a great social reformer. This chapter will assess and analyze Baldwin's great novels under the light of his attempt for social reconstruction and reformation.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

James Baldwin is one of the major American writers of the twentieth century. As a writer who bore the burden of representing so many identities on the margins of American society- bisexual African American, expatriate - Baldwin, alternated between prominence and reclusiveness in his life-time. He was fiercely opposed to labels of any kind, frustrating critics, professors, publishers and students who have attempted to categorize him. Unquestionably the most prominent African-American writer of the Civil Rights Era- a celebrated public figure as well as an important author- Baldwin remains a writer whom nearly all critics consider essential.

8. Bibliography in Standard Format:

Primary Sources-

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1953. Print.

---. *Giovanni's Room*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1956. Print.

---. *Another Country*. New York: Dial Press, 1962. Print.

---. *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*. New York: Dial Press, 1968. Print.

---. *If Beale Street Could Talk*. New York: Dial Press, 1974. Print.

---. *Just Above My Head*. New York: Dial Press, 1979. Print.

Secondary Sources-

Bone, Robert A. *James Baldwin – The Negro Novel in America*. London: Yale University Press, 1965. Print.

Campbell, James. *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.

Scott, Lynn Orilla. *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002. Print.

9. List of published papers of the candidate: Nil

Signature of the Supervisor Signature of the Candidate

Forwarded

Chairman, DRC